



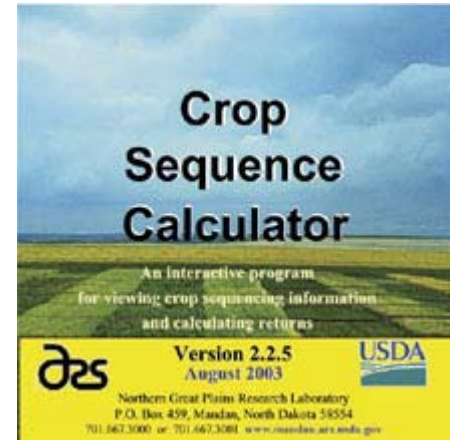
Crop Sequence Calculator 2.2.5 helps assess cropping systems

By ANDREA JOHNSON, For Lee Agri-Media

Producers in the Northern Great Plains have a useful tool for making crop rotation decisions.

The "Crop Sequence Calculator" provides farmers with a wealth of information on the impact of planting one crop vs. another based on the crop planted the year before.

Version 2.2.5 of the Calculator is available via CD-ROM and runs on Windows-based computer systems. USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory in Mandan, N.D., developed the program three years ago and has already updated the Calculator twice.



"Farmer response to the Calculator has been very positive," said Joe Krupinsky, USDA ARS plant pathologist. "We're approaching 10,000 distributed copies and that goes up through the Northern Plains and into Canada also."

The Calculator provides production information and the potential returns of crops in a diverse cropping system, focusing on the influence of crop sequencing. The computer program can calculate the expected yield of 10 different crops - barley, edible dry beans, canola, crambe, flax, dry peas, safflower, soybeans, sunflowers and wheat - raised in any two-year combination.

Farmers select their previous year's crops and then select what crops they might grow this year. A pull-down screen appears on the computer that provides different parameters for growing the new crop.

Next, the farmer plugs in their LDPs, as applicable, and other marketing information and the program will figure the profitability of the crop if it were raised in central North Dakota.

If the farmer thinks their data and yield is significantly different, they can key in their own data and see how that affects the profitability of growing the crop.

But this program isn't just about profitability. The goal of the Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory is sustainability - working for family farmers and protecting the land so that it can grow next year's crops and the next generation's crops.

The Crop Sequence Calculator takes into account several variables when figuring the sustainability of various crops.

Summary statements on crop production, plant diseases, insects, weeds, crop water use, and surface soil properties are automatically provided for each of the 100 possible crop sequence combinations.

The Calculator was recently revised to provide a more computer friendly environment, said Krupinsky. Although the basic data remains the same as in the previous version, editorial changes were made and many website links were added.

By selecting the "More Info" buttons adjacent to each summary statement, photographs, graphics, management principles and Internet resources are accessed.

By selecting a topic on a pull-down screen for "More information about" and clicking "go," additional resources are

accessed. For example, "More information about" concerning plant diseases includes graphs and photos of plant disease research results, an introduction to plant diseases, websites for plant disease information and a gallery of plant disease photographs.

There's also a photo library of diseases, weeds and insects that can help producers identify pests.

"Some producers have mentioned they didn't realize there was a weed I.D. photo album," said Krupinsky. "It's turned out to be a very useful tool. It's nice to have a place where you can pull up a certain weed and see what it looks like at various growth stages."

The underlying data for the Crop Sequence Calculator was generated with supplemental support from the Area IV Soil Conservation District, the National Sunflower Association, the N.D. Oilseed Council, and the Northern Canola Growers Association.

Copies of the Crop Sequence Calculator can be obtained from the Northern Great Plains Research Lab website at www.mandan.ars.usda.gov.

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